

condemnation process in the event that the Service does not reach an agreement for acquisition of the full title. You can be sure that I will do all I can to assist in that undertaking, including seeking appropriation of the necessary funds.

I look forward to continue working with you and the other members of Colorado's delegation in the Congress to protect the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and to complete action on the legislation that will establish it as a National Park.

Sincerely,

MARK UDALL.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. UPTON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 323, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate had passed a bill of the following title, in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1637. An act to extend through the end of the current fiscal year certain expiring Federal Aviation Administration authorizations.

PROVIDING FOR MINERAL LEASING OF CERTAIN INDIAN LANDS IN OKLAHOMA

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 944) to amend Public Law 105-188 to provide for the mineral leasing of certain Indian lands in Oklahoma.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 944

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. MINERAL LEASING OF CERTAIN INDIAN LANDS IN OKLAHOMA.

Public Law 105-188 (112 Stat. 620 and 621) is amended—

(1) in the title, by inserting "and certain former Indian reservations in Oklahoma" after "Fort Berthold Indian Reservation"; and

(2) in section 1—

(A) by striking the section heading and inserting the following:

"SECTION 1. LEASES OF CERTAIN ALLOTTED LANDS.":

and

(B) in subsection (a)(1)(A), by striking clause (i) and inserting the following:

"(i) is located within—

"(I) the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota; or

"(II) a former Indian reservation located in Oklahoma of—

"(aa) the Comanche Indian Tribe;

"(bb) the Kiowa Indian Tribe;

"(cc) the Apache Tribe;

"(dd) the Fort Sill Apache Tribe of Oklahoma;

"(ee) the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Wichita, Keechi, Waco, and Tawakonie) located in Oklahoma;

"(ff) the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma; or

"(gg) the Caddo Indian Tribe; and".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON).

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. SAXTON asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 944, legislation that would amend Public Law 105-188 to provide for the mineral leasing of certain Indian lands in Oklahoma.

Public Law 105-188 authorizes the Secretary of Interior to approve any mineral lease which affects an individually owned Indian tract of land within the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota if the majority of the Indian owners of the land consent and if the Secretary determines that the lease is in the best interest of the Indian owners. The lease would be binding on all owners of the leased tract, and all owners would share proportionally in the proceeds from the lease.

S. 944 would expand this law to include Indian lands within the former reservations of the Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, Fort Sill Apache, Wichita, Keechi, Waco, and Tawakonie Indian Tribes in Oklahoma.

S. 944 supersedes a 1909 law which requires unanimous consent before these individually owned Indian lands can be leased for oil or gas development. This is an almost impossible standard to meet because ownership of these lands has become very fractionalized over time. In one proposed project in Oklahoma, over 619 Indian owners have been identified, with more yet to come.

The resultant economic loss to individual Indian owners as well as to Indian tribes has been significant. S. 944 would facilitate oil and gas exploration on these individual Indian-owned lands, which will provide much needed funds for the Indian owners of these tracts.

Unanimous consent is not required for leases of other natural resources on Indian lands such as timber and hard rock minerals. The administration supports S. 944 as do all the Indian tribes specified in the bill.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, S. 944 would permit the execution of mineral extraction leases on individual Indian trust lands when more than 50 percent of owners agree to the lease. This bill will only affect about 8 tribes in the State of Oklahoma.

Under current law, more than 50 percent of owners need to approve a lease for agriculture or forestry purposes; however, 100 percent of owners need to approve a lease for mineral exploration. Due to the century-old Federal allotment policy, Indian-owned parcels of land can have dozens or, as we have heard, even more than that of owners. In many cases, not all owners can be found, while others may be tied up in a lengthy probate process.

This bill was passed by the Senate in August of this year and is supported by the Department of Interior. The gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), the senior Democratic member of the Committee on Resources, collected letters of support from each of the tribes whose members are included in this bill.

Similar legislation was passed last Congress with respect to mineral leases on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota, and I ask my colleagues to support passage of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS of Oklahoma. Mr. Speaker, as the House sponsor of this legislation, I rise in strong support of its passage. Simply put, this legislation will allow native American landowners to fully realize the benefits of their land.

Under current law, Indian lands possessed by more than one person will require the consent of 100 percent of the owners before mineral development can go forward. In many cases, this fractionated property is owned by more than 100 people. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to locate all of the owners. Once found, potential developers must obtain their unanimous consent. As my colleagues can imagine, this has the effect of driving off development.

Last year, Congress lowered this requirement for the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold Indian reservation for 50 percent. This brings the requirement in line with the regulations for non-Indian lands. Because of this, these tribes have seen development of many properties that were lying unused. This has been a great economic benefit to the reservation.

This bill will extend last year's legislation to seven Oklahoma tribes: the Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, Fort Sill Apache, Delaware, and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes.

In Oklahoma, oil and gas development provides a significant part of the income that many Indian landowners receive. This legislation will have an

immediate impact to the tribal members that are affected by making their allotted lands more competitive for oil and gas leasing. This will give a huge boost to the economies of this area of southwest Oklahoma and provide a tremendous economic benefit to the various tribes.

This legislation will not only provide an economic benefit to those tribes, it will allow them to use the land and resources that are rightfully theirs.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 944.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GRANTING THE VIRGIN ISLANDS GREATER FISCAL AUTONOMY

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2841) to amend the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands to provide for greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 2841

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. GREATER FISCAL AUTONOMY.

(a) ISSUANCE.—Section 8(b)(ii)(A) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(A)) is amended—

(1) in the first sentence, by inserting after “other evidence of indebtedness” the following: “, including but not limited to notes in anticipation of the collection of taxes or revenues, ”;

(2) by striking “to construct, improve, extend” and all that follows through “*Provided*, That no public” and inserting “for any public purpose authorized by the legislature: *Provided*, That no such”; and

(3) by striking “and payable semiannually. All such bonds shall be sold for not less than the principal amount thereof plus accrued interest”

(b) TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS AND CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

(1) REPEAL.—Section 8(b)(ii)(B) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(B)) is repealed.

(2) REDESIGNATION.—Section 8(b)(ii)(C) of the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands (48 U.S.C. 1574(b)(ii)(C)) is redesignated as section 8(b)(ii)(B).

(3) REDUNDANT PROVISION.—Section 1 of Public Law 94-392 (90 Stat. 1193) is amended by striking subsection (d).

SEC. 2. AGREEMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to enter into an agreement with the Governor of the Virgin Islands establishing mutually agreed financial accountability and performance standards for

the fiscal operations of the Government of the Virgin Islands.

(b) TRANSMISSION TO CONGRESS.—Upon ratification of the agreement authorized in subsection (a) by both parties, the Secretary shall forward a copy of the agreement to the Committee on Resources in the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in the Senate.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided by subsection (b), the amendments made by section 1 shall apply to those instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(b) EFFECT OF FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT.—If the agreement authorized in section 2(a) is not ratified by both parties on or before December 31, 1999, the amendments made by section 1—

(A) shall not apply to instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands on or after December 31, 1999; and

(B) shall continue to apply to those instruments of indebtedness issued by the Government of the Virgin Islands after the date of the enactment of this Act and before December 31, 1999.

SEC. 4. CONSTRUCTION.

These amendments to the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands are not intended to modify the internal revenue laws. Thus, the bonds authorized by this bill must comply with subsection (c) of section 149 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (which requires the new bonds to comply with the appropriate requirements of the Internal Revenue Code).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON).

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. SAXTON asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) for the great work that she has done in bringing this bill to the floor today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2841, to amend the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands to provide for greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions. This bill will allow the Government of the Virgin Islands to use new, flexible bonding authority to help them out of their current dire financial crisis. The new authority is conditioned on the Virgin Islands entering into an agreement committing to financial accountability and performance standards. This updated bonding authority is one way Congress can help the Virgin Islands to help themselves resolve their financial problems.

H.R. 2841 provides for: The Virgin Islands to enjoy the same fiscal authority of other states and territories for the issuance of general obligation bonds; a financial accountability and performance standards agreement to be concluded by the Government of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Interior; and the additional bonding authority to terminate if the financial accountability and performance

standards agreement is not concluded by December 31, 1999.

Members should know that the amendments to the Virgin Islands Organic Act made by this bill are not intended to modify the internal revenue laws. Thus, the bonds authorized by H.R. 2841 must comply with subsection (c) of section 149 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. I thank Chairman ARCHER of the Ways and Means Committee and his staff as well as the Joint Committee on Taxation for their extraordinary cooperation in helping to schedule this bill today.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) for his kind remarks and for joining me on the floor this afternoon for an explanation of H.R. 2481, to provide the Virgin Islands with greater fiscal autonomy consistent with other United States jurisdictions.

I want to thank the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), chairman, and the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER), the ranking member, for their support on this bill and for their willingness to assist the Virgin Islands generally to recover from our fiscal difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Virgin Islands requested that I introduce H.R. 2481 to make it less expensive for his administration to close on a planned financing to meet currently due obligations as well as to provide sufficient cash reserves to operate the territorial government while his deficit reduction plan and budget initiatives take effect.

Usually matters such as this one relating to the bonding authority to a particular State or territory are defined by local law. However, in the case of my district, the U.S. Virgin Islands, we have not yet adopted a constitution, and the Federal law which acts as our constitution does not give us the same general obligation bonding authority enjoyed by other local jurisdictions; thus the need for this bill which was reported out of Committee on Resources by a unanimous vote.

I also want to take this opportunity to discuss briefly the overall financial picture of the U.S. Virgin Islands, as further background.

We are presently wrestling with a large cumulative deficit which has developed over the last 10 years and an annual operating deficit which has brought the Territory close to the bridge of fiscal collapse. The causes are many, both internal and external.

As my colleagues know, we have been the victim of a series of hundred-year hurricanes which came at such a rate and pace that we have never been able to completely recover.